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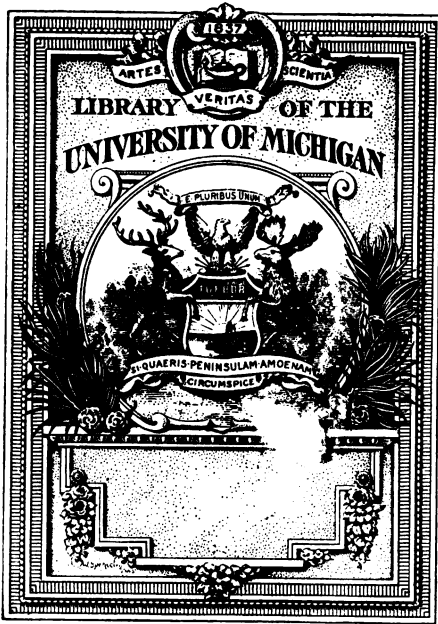
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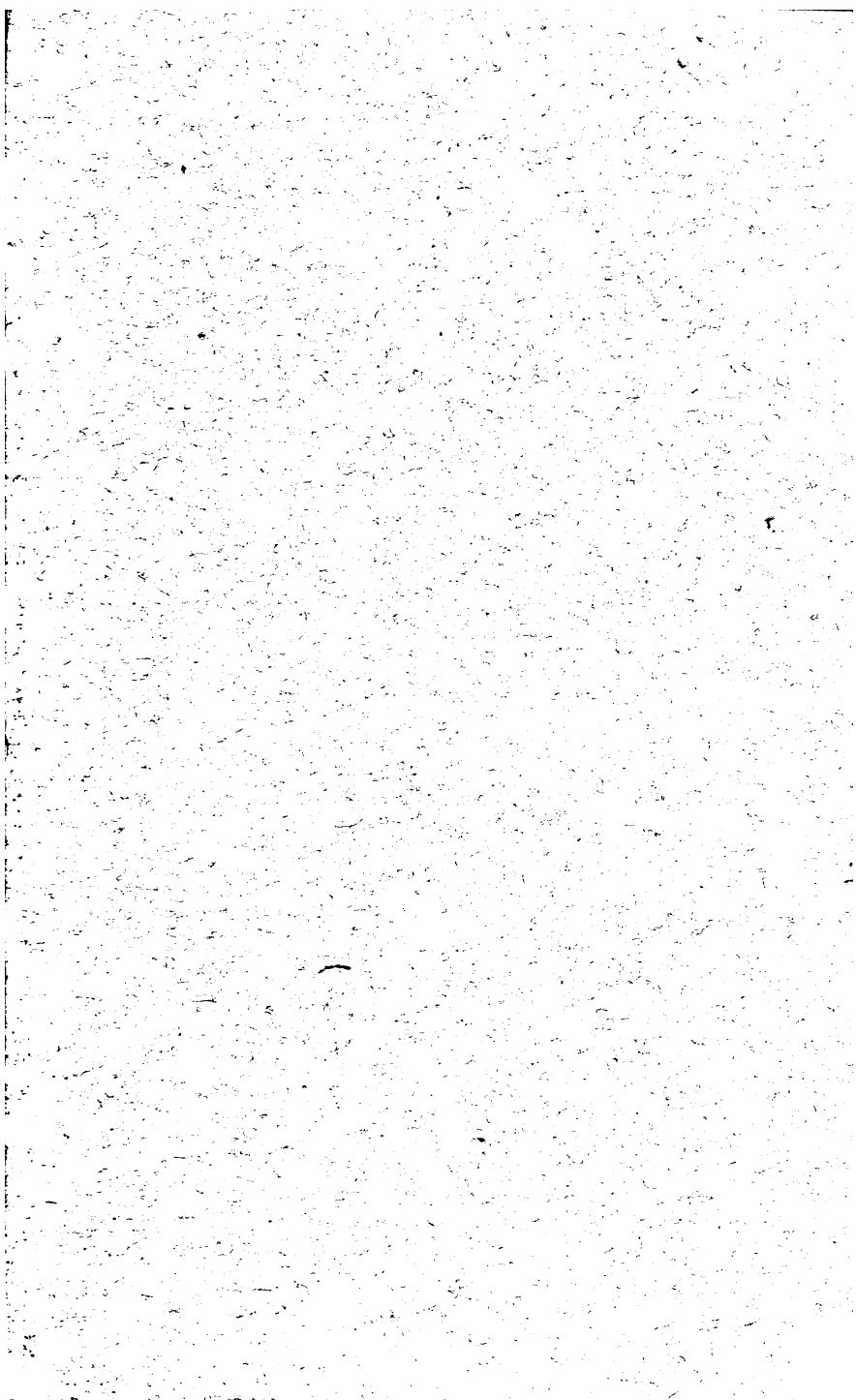


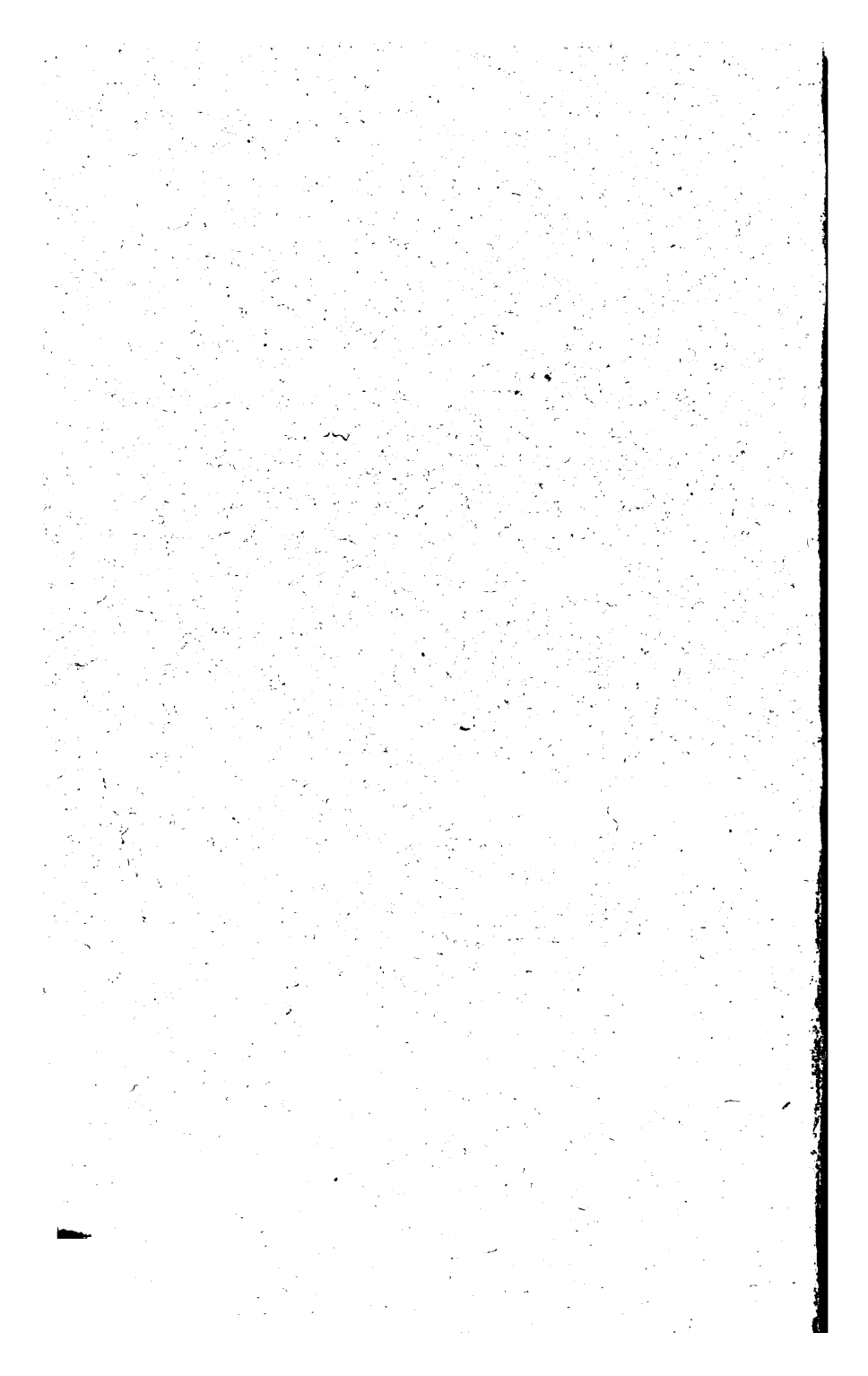
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CONJECTURES  
ON  
UNIV. OF MICHIGAN  
DEC 27 1897  
ORIGINAL COMPOSITION.

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IN A  
LETTER  
TO THE  
AUTHOR  
OF  
SIR CHARLES GRANDISON.

Edward Young

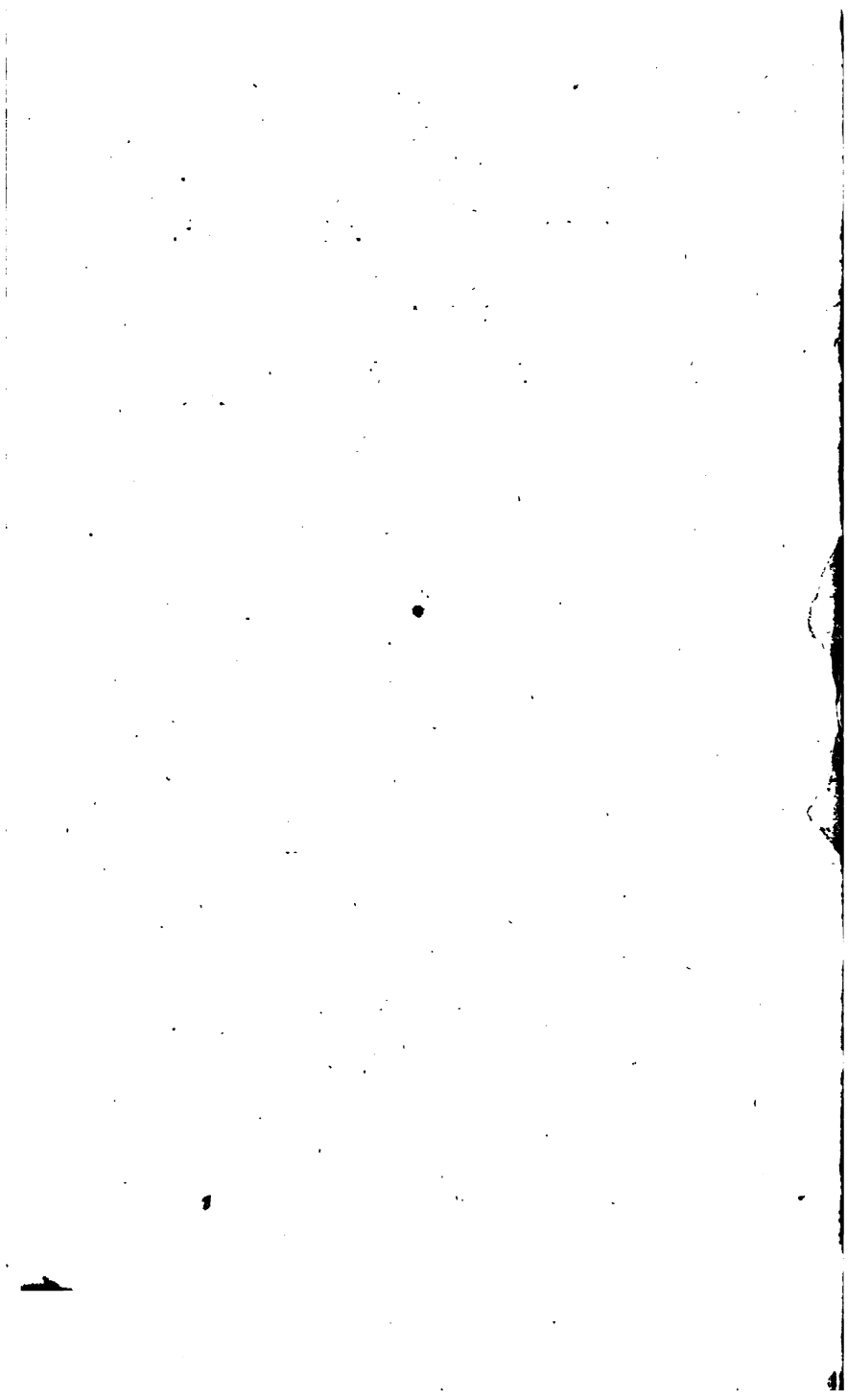
*Si habet aliquod tanquam pabulum studii, & doctrinae,  
otiosa senectute nihil est jucundius.* CIC.

The SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

Printed for A. MILLAR, in *The Strand*; and  
R. and J. DODSLEY, in *Pall-Mall*.

M. DCC. LIX.








A  
 L E T T E R  
 TO THE  
 A U T H O R  
 OF  
 Sir CHARLES GRANDISON.

recd. 29-11-27 1818

*Dear Sir,*


 E confess the follies of youth without a blush; not so, those of age. However, keep me a little in countenance, by considering, that age wants amusements more, tho'

B it

-it can justify them less, than the preceding periods of life. How you may relish the pastime here sent you, I know not. It is miscellaneous in its nature, somewhat licentious in its conduct; and, perhaps, not over important in its end. However, I have endeavoured to make some amends, by digressing into subjects more important, and more suitable to my season of life. A serious thought standing single among many of a lighter nature, will sometimes strike the careless wanderer after amusement only, with useful awe: as monumental marbles scattered in a wide pleasure-garden (and such there are) will call to recollection those who would never have sought it in a church-yard-walk of mournful yews.

To

[ 3. ]

To one such monument I may  
conduct you, in which is a hidden  
lustre, like the sepulchral lamps of  
old; but not like those will This be  
extinguished, but shine the brighter  
for being produced, after so long  
concealment, into open day:

You remember that your worthy  
patron, and our common friend,  
put some questions on the *Serious  
Drama*, at the same time when he  
desired our sentiments on *Original*,  
and on *Moral Composition*. Tho'  
I despair of breaking thro' the frozen  
obstructions of age, and care's in-  
cumbent cloud, into that flow of  
thought, and brightness of expres-  
sion, which subjects so polite re-  
quire; yet will I hazard some con-  
jectures on them.

I begin with *Original* Composition; and the more willingly, as it seems an original subject to me, who have seen nothing hitherto written on it: But, first, a few thoughts on Composition in general. Some are of opinion, that its growth, at present, is too luxuriant; and that the Press is overcharged: Overcharged, I think, it could never be, if none were admitted, but such as brought their Imprimatur from *sound Understanding*, and the *Public Good*. Wit, indeed, however brilliant, should not be permitted to gaze self-enamoured on its useless Charms, in that Fountain of Fame (if so I may call the Press), if beauty is all that it has to boast; but, like the first *Brutus*, it should sacrifice its most darling offspring to the sacred interests of virtue, and real service of mankind.

This

This restriction allowed, the more composition the better. To men of letters, and leisure, it is not only a noble amusement, but a sweet refuge; it improves their parts, and promotes their peace: It opens a back-door out of the bustle of this busy, and idle world, into a delicious garden of moral and intellectual fruits and flowers; the key of which is denied to the rest of mankind. When stung with idle anxieties, or teased with fruitless impertinence, or yawning over insipid diversions, then we perceive the blessing of a letter'd recess. With what a gust do we retire to our disinterested, and immortal friends in our closet, and find our minds, when applied to some favourite theme, as naturally, and as easily quieted, and refreshed, as a peevish child (and peevish children are we

all till we fall asleep) when laid to the breast? Our happiness no longer lives on charity; nor bids fair for a fall, by leaning on that most precarious, and thorny pillow, another's pleasure, for our repose. How independent of the world is he, who can daily find new acquaintance, that at once entertain, and improve him, in the little world, the minute but fruitful creation, of his own mind?

These advantages *Composition* affords us, whether we write ourselves, or in more humble amusement peruse the works of others. While we bustle thro' the thronged walks of public life, it gives us a respite, at least, from care; a pleasing pause of refreshing recollection. If the country is our choice, or fate, there  
it

it rescues us from *sloth* and *sensuality*, which, like obscene vermin, are apt gradually to creep unperceived into the delightful bowers of our retirement, and to poison all its sweets. Conscious guilt robs the rose of its scent, the lilly of its lustre; and makes an *Eden* a deflowered, and dismal scene.

Moreover, if we consider life's endless evils, what can be more prudent, than to provide for consolation under them? A consolation under them the wisest of men have found in the pleasures of the pen. Witness, among many more, *Thucydides*, *Xenophon*, *Tully*, *Ovid*, *Seneca*, *Pliny* the younger, who says, *In uxoris infirmitate, & amicorum periculo, aut morte turbatus, ad studia, unicum doloris levamentum, confugio.*

*fugio.* And why not add to these their modern equals, *Chaucer, Raleigh, Bacon, Milton, Clarendon,* under the same shield, unwounded by misfortune, and nobly smiling in distress?

*Composition* was a cordial to these under the frowns of fortune; but evils there are, which her smiles cannot prevent, or cure. Among these are the languors of old age. If those are held honourable, who in a hand benumbed by time have grasped the just sword in defence of their country; shall they be less esteemed, whose unsteady pen vibrates to the last in the cause of religion, of virtue, of learning? Both These are happy in *this*, that by fixing their attention on objects most important, they escape numberless



berless little anxieties, and that *sedium vitæ* which often hangs so heavy on its evening hours. May not this insinuate some apology for my spilling ink, and spoiling paper, so late in life?

But there are, who write with vigor, and success, to the world's delight, and their own renown. These are the glorious fruits where genius prevails. The mind of a man of genius is a fertile and pleasant field, pleasant as *Elysium*, and fertile as *Tempe*; it enjoys a perpetual spring. Of that spring, *Originals* are the fairest flowers: *Imitations* are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom. *Imitations* are of two kinds; one of nature, one of authors: The first we call *Originals*, and confine the term *Imitation* to the

the second. I shall not enter into the curious enquiry of what is, or is not, strictly speaking, *Original*, content with what all must allow, that some compositions are more so than others; and the more they are so, I say, the better. *Originals* are, and ought to be, great favourites, for they are great benefactors; they extend the republic of letters, and add a new province to its dominion: *Imitators* only give us a sort of duplicates of what we had, possibly much better, before; increasing the mere drug of books, while all that makes them valuable, *knowledge* and *genius*, are at a stand. The pen of an *original* writer, like *Armida's* wand, out of a barren waste calls a blooming spring: Out of that blooming spring an *Imitator* is a transplanter of laurels, which some-  
times

times die on removal, always languish in a foreign soil.

But suppose an *Imitator* to be most excellent (and such there are), yet still he but nobly builds on another's foundation; his debt is, at least, equal to his glory; which therefore, on the balance, cannot be very great. On the contrary, an *Original*, tho' but indifferent (its *Originality* being set aside), yet has something to boast; it is something to say with him in *Horace*,

*Meo sum Pauper in ære;*

and to share ambition with no less than *Cæsar*, who declared he had rather be the first in a village, than the second at *Rome*.

Still farther: An *Imitator* shares  
his

his crown, if he has one, with the chosen object of his imitation; an *Original* enjoys an undivided applause. An *Original* may be said to be of a *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*: *Imitations* are often a sort of *manufacture* wrought up by those *mechanics*, *art*, and *labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own.

Again: We read *Imitation* with somewhat of his languor, who listens to a twice-told tale: Our spirits rouse at an *Original*; that is a perfect stranger, and all throng to learn what news from a foreign land: And tho' it comes, like an *Indian* prince, adorned with feathers only, having little of weight; yet of our attention it will rob the more solid,  
if

if not equally new : Thus every telescope is lifted at a new-discovered star ; it makes a hundred astronomers in a moment, and denies equal notice to the sun. But if an *Original*, by being as excellent, as new, adds admiration to surprize, then are we at the writer's mercy ; on the strong wing of his imagination, we are snatched from *Britain* to *Italy*, from climate to climate, from pleasure to pleasure ; we have no home, no thought, of our own ; till the magician drops his pen : And then falling down into ourselves, we awake to flat realities, lamenting the change, like the beggar who dreamt himself a prince.

It is with thoughts, as it is with words ; and with both, as with men ;

men; they may grow old, and die: Words tarnished, by passing thro' the mouths of the vulgar, are laid aside as inelegant, and obsolete. So thoughts, when become too common, should lose their currency; and we should send new metal to the mint, that is, new meaning to the press. The division of tongues at *Babel* did not more effectually debar men from *making themselves a name* (as the Scripture speaks,) than the too great concurrence, or union of tongues will do for ever. We may as well grow good by another's virtue, or fat by another's food, as famous by another's thought. The world will pay its debt of praise but once; and instead of applauding, explode a second demand; as a cheat.

If it is said, that most of the *Latin* classics, and all the *Greek*, except, perhaps, *Homer*, *Pindar*, and *Anacreon*, are in the number of *Imitators*, yet receive our highest applause; our answer is, That they, tho' not *real*, are *accidental Originals*; the works they imitated, few excepted, are lost: They, on their father's decease, enter as lawful heirs, on their estates in fame: The fathers of our copyists are still in possession; and secured in it, in spite of *Goths*, and *Flames*, by the perpetuating power of the *Press*. Very late must a modern *Imitator's* fame arrive, if it waits for their decease.

An *Original* enters early on reputation: *Fame*, fond of new glories, sounds her trumpet in triumph

triumph at its birth ; and yet how few are awaken'd by it into the noble ambition of like attempts ?

Ambition is sometimes no vice in life ; it is always a virtue in Composition. High in the towering *Alps* is the fountain of the *Po* ; high in fame, and in antiquity, is the fountain of an *Imitator's* undertaking ; but the river, and the imitation, humbly creep along the vale. So few are our *Originals* ; that, if all other books were to be burnt, the letter'd world would resemble some metropolis in flames, where a few incombustible buildings, a fortress, temple, or tower, lift their heads, in melancholy grandeur, amid the mighty ruin. Compared with this conflagration, old *Omar* lighted up but a small bonfire, when he heated the baths  
of



of the Barbarians, for eight months together, with the famed *Alexandrian* library's 'inestimable' spoils, that no prophane book might obstruct the triumphant progress of his holy *Alcoran* round the globe.

But why are *Originals* so few? not because the writer's harvest is over; the great reapers of antiquity having left nothing to be gleaned after them; nor because the human mind's teeming time is past, or because it is incapable of putting forth unprecedented births; but because illustrious examples *engross*, *prejudice*, and *intimidate*. They *engross* our attention, and so prevent a due inspection of ourselves; they *prejudice* our judgment in favour of their abilities, and so lessen the sense of our own; and they *intimidate*

us with the splendor of their renown, and thus under diffidence bury our strength. Nature's impossibilities, and those of diffidence, lie wide asunder.

Let it not be suspected, that I would weakly insinuate any thing in favour of the moderns, as compared with antient authors; no, I am lamenting their great inferiority. But I think it is no *necessary* inferiority; that it is not from divine destination, but from some cause far beneath the moon\*: I think that human souls, thro' all periods, are equal; that due care, and exertion, would set us nearer our immortal predecessors than we are at present; and he who questions and confutes this, will show abilities not a little

\* Enquiry into the Life of *Homer*, p. 76.

tending toward a proof of that equality, which he denies.

After all, the first ancients had no merit in being *Originals*: They could *not* be *Imitators*: Modern writers have a *choice* to make; and therefore have a merit in their power. They may soar in the regions of *liberty*, or move in the soft fetters of easy *imitation*; and *imitation* has as many plausible reasons to urge, as *Pleasure* had to offer to *Hercules*. *Hercules* made the choice of an hero, and *so* became immortal.

Yet let not assertors of classic excellence imagine, that I deny the tribute it so well deserves. He that admires not antient authors, betrays a secret he would conceal, and tells the world, that he does not

understand them. Let us be as far from neglecting, as from copying, their admirable compositions: Sacred be their rights, and inviolable their fame. Let our understanding feed on theirs; they afford the noblest nourishment: But let them nourish, not annihilate, our own. When we read, let our imagination kindle at their charms; when we write, let our judgment shut them out of our thoughts; treat even *Homer* himself, as his royal admirer was treated by the cynic; bid him stand aside, nor shade our Composition from the beams of our own genius; for nothing *Original* can rise, nothing immortal, can ripen, in any other sun.

[ Must we then, you say, not imitate ancient authors? Imitate them, by

by all means; but imitate aright. He that imitates the divine *Iliad*, does not imitate *Homer*; but he who takes the same method, which *Homer* took, for arriving at a capacity of accomplishing a work so great. Tread in his steps to the sole fountain of immortality; drink where he drank, at the true *Helicon*, that is, at the breast of nature; imitate; but imitate not the *Composition*, but the *Man*. For may not this paradox pass into a maxim? *vis.* "The less we copy the renowned antients, we shall resemble them the more."

But possibly you may reply, that you must either imitate *Homer*, or depart from nature. Not so: For suppose you was to change place, in time, with *Homer*; then, if you

write naturally, you might as well charge *Homer* with an imitation of you. Can you be said to imitate *Homer* for writing so, as you would have written, if *Homer* had never been? As far as a regard to nature, and sound sense, will permit a departure from your great predecessors; so far, ambitiously, depart from them; the farther from them in *similitude*, the nearer are you to them in *excellence*; you rise by it into an *Original*; become a noble collateral, not an humble descendant from them. Let us build our Compositions with the spirit, and in the taste, of the antients; but not with their materials: Thus will they resemble the structures of *Pericles* at *Athens*, which *Plutarch* commends for having had an air of antiquity as soon as they were built.

built. All eminence, and distinction, lies out of the beaten road; excursion, and deviation, are necessary to find it; and the more remote your path from the highway, the more reputable; if, like poor *Gulliver* (of whom anon) you fall not into a ditch, in your way to glory.

What glory to come near, what glory to reach, what glory (presumptuous thought!) to surpass, our predecessors? And is that then in nature absolutely impossible? Or is it not, rather, contrary to nature to fail in it? Nature herself sets the ladder, all wanting is our ambition to climb. For by the bounty of nature we are as strong as our predecessors; and by the favour of time (which is but another round in nature's scale) we stand on higher ground.

ground. As to the *first*, were they more than men? Or are we less? Are not our minds cast in the same mould, with those before the flood? The flood affected matter; mind escaped. As to the *second*; though we are moderns, the world is an antient; more antient far, than when they, whom we most admire, filled it with their fame. Have we not their beauties, as stars, to guide; their defects, as rocks, to be shunn'd; the judgment of ages on both, as a chart to conduct, and a sure helm to steer us in our passage to greater perfection than theirs? And shall we be stopt in our rival pretensions to fame by this just reproof?

*Scat. contra, dicitque tibi tua pagina,*  
*Furor.* MART.

It is by a sort of noble contagion  
 from



from a general familiarity with their writings, and not by any particular fordid theft, that we can be the better for those who went before us. Hope we, from plagiarism, any dominion in literature; as that of *Rome* arose from a nest of thieves?

*Rome* was a powerful ally to many states; ancient authors are our powerful allies; but we must take heed, that they do not succour, till they enslave, after the manner of *Rome*. Too formidable an idea of their superiority, like a spectre, would fright us out of a proper use of our wits; and dwarf our understanding, by making a giant of theirs. Too great awe for them lays genius under restraint, and denies it that free scope, that full elbow-room, which is requisite for striking its most masterly

sterly strokes. Genius is a master-workman, learning is but an instrument; and an instrument, tho' most valuable, yet not always indispensable. Heaven will not admit of a partner in the accomplishment of some favourite spirits; but rejecting all human means, assumes the whole glory to itself. Have not some, tho' not famed for erudition; *so* written, as almost to persuade us, that they shone brighter, and soared higher, for escaping the boasted aid of that proud ally?

Nor is it strange; for what, for the most part, mean we by genius, but the power of accomplishing great things without the means generally reputed necessary to that end? A *genius* differs from a *good understanding*, as a magician from

a good architect; *that* raises his structure by means invisible; *this* by the skilful use of common tools. Hence genius has ever been supposed to partake of something divine. *Nemo unquam vir magnus fuit, sine aliquo afflatu divino.*

*Learning*, destitute of this superior aid, is fond, and proud, of what has cost it much pains; is a great lover of rules, and boaster of famed examples: As beauties less perfect, who owe half their charms to cautious art, learning inveighs against natural unstudied graces, and small harmless inaccuracies, and sets rigid bounds to that liberty, to which genius often owes its supreme glory; but the no-genius its frequent ruin. For unprescribed beauties, and unexampled excellence,

lence, which are characteristics of *genius*, lie without the pale of *learning's* authorities, and laws; which pale, *genius* must leap to come at them: But by that leap, if *genius* is wanting, we break our necks; we lose that little credit, which possibly we might have enjoyed before. For rules, like crutches, are a needful aid to the lame, tho' an impediment to the strong. A *Homer* casts them away; and, like his *Achilles*,

*Jura negat sibi nata, nihil non arrogat,*

by native force of mind. There is something in poetry beyond prose-reason; there are mysteries in it not to be explained, but admired; which render mere prose-men infidels to their divinity. And here pardon a second paradox; *viz.* "*Genius* often  
" then

“ then deserves most to be praised,  
 “ when it is most sure to be con-  
 “ demned; that is, when its excel-  
 “ lence, from mounting high, to  
 “ weak eyes is quite out of sight.”

If I might speak farther of learn-  
 ing, and genius, I would compare  
 genius to virtue, and learning to  
 riches. As riches are most wanted  
 where there is least virtue; so learn-  
 ing where there is least genius. As  
 virtue without much riches can  
 give happiness, so genius without  
 much learning can give renown.  
 As it is said in *Terence*, *Pecunia*  
*negligere interdum maximum est lu-*  
*crum*; so to neglect of learning,  
 genius sometimes owes its greater  
 glory. Genius, therefore, leaves but  
 the second place, among men of  
 letters, to the learned. It is their  
 merit,

merit, and ambition, to fling light on the works of genius, and point out its charms. We most justly reverence their informing radius for that favour; but we must much more admire the radiant stars pointed out by them.

A star of the first magnitude among the moderns was *Shakespeare*; among the antients, *Pindar*; who (as *Vossius* tells us) boasted of his no-learning, calling himself the eagle, for his flight above it. And such geniï as these may, indeed, have much reliance on their own native powers. For genius may be compared to the natural strength of the body; learning to the superinduced accoutrements of arms: if the first is equal to the proposed exploit, the latter rather encumbers

bers, than assists; rather retards, than promotes, the victory. *Sacer nobis inest Deus*, says *Seneca*. With regard to the moral world, *conscience*, with regard to the intellectual, *genius*, is that god within. Genius can set us right in Composition, without the rules of the learned; as conscience sets us right in life, without the laws of the land: *This*, singly, can make us good, as men: *that*, singly, as writers, can, sometimes, make us great.

I say, sometimes, because there is a genius, which stands in need of learning to make it shine. Of genius there are two species, an earlier, and a later; or call them *infantine*, and *adult*. An adult genius comes out of nature's hand, as *Pallas* out of *Jove's* head, at full growth, and  
mature:

mature : *Shakespeare's* genius was of  
 this kind : On the contrary, *Swift*  
 stumbled at the threshold, and set  
 out for distinction on feeble knees :  
 His was an infantine genius ; a ge-  
 nius, which, like other infants, must  
 be nursed, and educated ; or it will  
 come to nought : Learning is its  
 nurse, and tutor ; but this nurse  
 may overlay with an indigested load,  
 which smother's common sense ; and  
 this tutor may mislead, with pe-  
 dantic prejudice, which vitiates the  
 best understanding : As too great  
 admirers of the fathers of the church  
 have sometimes set up their authority  
 against the true sense of Scripture ;  
 so too great admirers of the classical  
 fathers have sometimes set up their  
 authority, or example, against  
 reason.

*Note*



*Nevè minor, nèu fit quinto productior actu  
Fabula.*

So says *Horace*, so says antient example. But reason has not subscribed. I know but one book that can justify our implicit acquiescence in it: And (by the way) on that book a noble disdain of undue deference to prior opinion has lately cast, and is still casting, a new and inestimable light.

But, superstition for our predecessors set aside, the classics are for ever our rightful and revered masters in *Composition*; and our understandings bow before them: But when? When a master is wanted; which, sometimes, as I have shown, is not the case. Some are pupils of nature only, nor go farther to school: From such we reap often a double

D                      advan-

advantage; they not only rival the reputation of the great antient authors, but also reduce the number of mean ones among the moderns. For when they enter on subjects which have been in former hands, such is their superiority, that, like a tenth wave, they overwhelm, and bury in oblivion all that went before: And thus not only enrich and adorn, but remove a load, and lessen the labour, of the letter'd world.

“ But, you say, since *Originals* can  
 “ arise from genius only, and since  
 “ genius is so very rare, it is scarce  
 “ worth while to labour a point so  
 “ much, from which we can rea-  
 “ sonably expect so little.” To  
 show that genius is not so very rare  
 as you imagine, I shall point out

strong instances of it, in a far distant quarter from that mentioned above. The minds of the schoolmen were almost as much cloistered as their bodies; they had but little learning, and few books; yet may the most learned be struck with some astonishment at their so singular natural sagacity, and most exquisite edge of thought. Who would expect to find *Pindar* and *Scotus*, *Shakespeare* and *Aquinas*, of the same party? Both equally shew an *original*, unindebted, energy; the *vigor igneus*, and *cælestis origo*, burns in both; and leaves us in doubt whether genius is more evident in the sublime flights and beautiful flowers of poetry, or in the profound penetrations, and marvelously keen and minute distinctions, called the *thorns* of the schools.

There might have been more able consuls called from the plough, than ever arrived at that honour: Many a genius, probably, there has been, which could neither write, nor read. So that genius, that supreme lustre of literature, is less rare than you conceive.

By the praise of genius we detract not from learning; we detract not from the value of gold, by saying that diamond has greater still. He who disregards learning, shows that he wants its aid; and he that overvalues it, shows that its aid has done him harm. Overvalued indeed it cannot be, if genius, as to *Composition*, is valued more. Learning we thank, genius we revere; That gives us pleasure, This gives us rapture; That informs, This inspires; and

and is itself inspired; for genius is from heaven, learning from man: *This* sets us above the low, and illiterate; *That*, above the learned, and polite. Learning is borrowed knowledge; genius is knowledge innate, and quite our own. Therefore, as *Bacon* observes, it may take a nobler name, and be called Wisdom; in which sense of wisdom, some are born wise.

But here a caution is necessary against the most fatal of errors in those automaths, those self-taught philosophers of our age, who set up genius, and often, mere *fancied* genius, not only above human learning, but divine truth. I have called genius wisdom; but let it be remembered, that in the most renowned ages of the most refined heathen wisdom

(and theirs is not Christian) “ *the world by wisdom knew not God, and it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those that believed.*” In the fairyland of fancy, genius may wander wild; there it has a creative power, and may reign arbitrarily over its own empire of chimeras. The wide field of nature also lies open before it, where it may range unconfined, make what discoveries it can, and sport with its infinite objects untrouled, as far as visible nature extends, painting them as wantonly as it will: But what painter of the most unbounded and exalted genius can give us the true portrait of a seraph? He can give us only what by his own, or others eyes, has been seen; tho’ that indeed infinitely compounded, raised, burlesqued, dishonoured, or adorned:

adorned: In like manner, who can give us divine truth unrevealed? Much less should any presume to set aside divine truth when revealed, as incongruous to their own sagacities.—Is this too serious for my subject? I shall be more so before I close.

Having put in a caveat against the most fatal of errors, from the too great indulgence of genius, return we now to that too great suppression of it, which is detrimental to Composition; and endeavour to rescue the writer, as well as the man. I have said, that some are born wise; but they, like those that are born rich, by neglecting the cultivation and produce of their own possessions, and by running in debt, may be beggared at last; and

lose their reputations, as younger brothers estates, not by being born with less abilities than the rich heir, but at too late an hour.

Many a great man has been lost to himself, and the publick, purely because great ones were born before him. *Hermias*, in his collections on *Homer's* blindness, says, that *Homer* requesting the gods to grant him a fight of *Achilles*, that hero rose, but in armour so bright, that it struck *Homer* blind with the blaze. Let not the blaze of even *Homer's* muse darken us to the discernment of our own powers; which may possibly set us above the rank of *Imitators*; who, though most excellent, and even immortal (as some of them are) yet are still but *Dii minorum gentium*, nor can expect  
the



the largest share of incense, the greatest profusion of praise, on their secondary altars.

But farther still : a spirit of *Imitation* hath many ill effects ; I shall confine myself to three. *First*, It deprives the liberal and politer arts of an advantage which the mechanic enjoy : In these, men are ever endeavouring to go beyond their predecessors ; in the former, to follow them. And since copies surpass not their *Originals*, as streams rise not higher than their spring, rarely so high ; hence, while arts mechanic are in perpetual progress, and increase, the liberal are in retrogradation, and decay. *These* resemble pyramids, are broad at bottom, but lessen exceedingly as they rise ; *Those* resemble rivers which, from a small fountain-

fountain-head, are spreading ever wider and wider, as they run. Hence it is evident, that different portions of understanding are not (as some imagine) allotted to different periods of time; for we see, in the same period, understanding rising in one set of artists, and declining in another. Therefore *nature* stands absolved, and our inferiority in Composition must be charged on ourselves.

Nay, so far are we from complying with a necessity, which nature lays us under, that, *Secondly*, by a spirit of *Imitation* we counteract nature, and thwart her design. She brings us into the world all *Originals*: No two faces, no two minds, are just alike; but all bear nature's evident mark of separation

on

on them. Born *Originals*, how comes it to pass that we die *Copies*? That meddling ape *Imitation*, as soon as we come to years of *Indiscretion* (so let me speak), snatches the pen, and blots out nature's mark of separation, cancels her kind intention, destroys all mental individuality; the letter'd world no longer consists of singulars, it is a medly, a mass; and a hundred books, at bottom, are but One. Why are Monkeys such masters of mimickry? Why receive they such a talent at imitation? Is it not as the *Spartan* slaves received a licence for ebriety; that their betters might be ashamed of it?

The *Third* fault to be found with a spirit of *Imitation* is, that with great incongruity it makes us poor, and proud; makes us think little, and  
write

write much; gives us huge folios, which are little better than more reputable cushions to promote our repose. Have not some sevenfold volumes put us in mind of *Ovid's* sevenfold channels of the *Nile* at the conflagration?

*Ostia septem*

*Pulverulenta vacant septem sine flumine valles.*

Such leaden labours are like *Lycurgus's* iron money, which was so much less in value than in bulk, that it required barns for strong-boxes, and a yoke of oxen to draw five hundred pounds.

But notwithstanding these disadvantages of *Imitation*, imitation must be the lot (and often an honourable lot it is) of most writers. If there is a famine of *invention* in the  
land,

land, like *Joseph's* brethren, we must travel far for food; we must visit the remote, and rich, Antients; but an inventive genius may safely stay at home; that, like the widow's cruse, is divinely replenished from within; and affords us a miraculous delight. Whether our own genius be such, or not, we diligently should inquire; that we may not go a begging with gold in our purse. For there is a mine in man, which must be deeply dug ere we can conjecture its contents. Another often sees that in us, which we see not ourselves; and may there not be that in us which is unseen by both? That there may, chance often discovers, either by a luckily chosen theme, or a mighty premium, or an absolute necessity of exertion, or a noble stroke of emulation from another's glory;

sculpture, and architecture, a tax levied for the support of a war. *Cæsar* dropt his papers when *Tully* spoke; and *Philip* trembled at the voice of *Demosthenes*: And has there arisen but one *Tully*, one *Demosthenes*, in so long a course of years? The powerful eloquence of them both in one stream, should never bear me down into the melancholy persuasion, that several have not been born, tho' they have not emerged. The sun as much exists in a cloudy day, as in a clear; it is outward, accidental circumstances that with regard to genius either in nation, or age,

*Collectas fugat nubes, solemque reducit. VIRG.*

As great, perhaps, greater than those mentioned (presumptuous as it may sound) may, possibly, arise; for  
 who

who hath fathomed the mind of man? Its bounds are as unknown, as those of the creation; since the birth of which, perhaps, not One has so far exerted, as not to leave his possibilities beyond his attainments, his powers beyond his exploits. Forming our judgments, altogether by what *has* been done, without knowing, or at all inquiring, what possibly *might* have been done, we naturally enough fall into too mean an opinion of the human mind. If a sketch of the divine Iliad before *Homer* wrote, had been given to mankind, by some superior being, or otherwise, its execution would, probably, have appeared beyond the power of man. Now, to surpass it, we think impossible. As the first of these opinions would evidently have been a mistake, why

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may not the second be so too? Both are founded on the same bottom ; on our ignorance of the possible dimensions of the mind of man.

Nor are we only ignorant of the dimensions of the human mind in general, but even of our own. That a man may be scarce less ignorant of his own powers, than an oyster of its pearl, or a rock of its diamond ; that he may possess dormant, unsuspected abilities, till awakened by loud calls, or stung up by striking emergencies, is evident from the sudden eruption of some men, out of perfect obscurity, into publick admiration, on the strong impulse of some animating occasion ; not more to the world's great surprize, than their own. Few authors of distinction but have experienced something



something of this nature, at the first beamings of their yet unsuspected genius on their hitherto dark Composition: The writer starts at it, as at a lucid meteor in the night; is much surprized; can scarce believe it true. During his happy confusion, it may be said to him, as to *Eve* at the lake,

*What there thou seest, fair creature,  
is thyself.* MILT.

Genius, in this view, is like a dear friend in our company under disguise; who, while we are lamenting his absence, drops his mask, striking us, at once, with equal surprize and joy. This sensation, which I speak of in a writer, might favour, and so promote, the fable of poetic inspiration: A poet of a strong imagination, and stronger vanity, on feeling it, might

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naturally enough realize the world's mere compliment, and think himself truly inspired. Which is not improbable; for enthusiasts of all kinds do no less.

Since it is plain that men may be strangers to their own abilities; and by thinking meanly of them without just cause, may possibly lose a name, perhaps a name immortal; I would find some means to prevent these evils. Whatever promotes virtue, promotes something more, and carries its good influence beyond the *moral* man: To prevent these evils, I borrow two golden rules from *ethics*, which are no less golden in *Composition*, than in life.

1. *Know thyself*; 2dly, *Reverence thyself*. I design to repay ethics in a future

a future letter, by two rules from rhetoric for its service.

1st. *Know thyself.* Of ourselves it may be said, as *Martial* says of a bad neighbour,

*Nil tam prope, proculque nobis.*

Therefore dive deep into thy bosom; learn the depth, extent, bias, and full fort of thy mind; contract full intimacy with the stranger within thee; excite and cherish every spark of intellectual light and heat, however smothered under former negligence, or scattered through the dull, dark mass of common thoughts; and collecting them into a body, let thy genius rise (if a genius thou hast) as the sun from chaos; and if I should then say, like an *Indian*, *Worship it*, (though too bold) yet should I say

little more than my second rule enjoins, (*viz.*) *Reverence thyself.*

That is, let not great examples, or authorities, browbeat thy reason into too great a diffidence of thyself: Thyself so reverence, as to prefer the native growth of thy own mind to the richest import from abroad; such borrowed riches make us poor. The man who thus reverences himself, will soon find the world's reverence to follow his own. His works will stand distinguished; his the sole property of them; which property alone can confer the noble title of an *author*; that is, of one who (to speak accurately) *thinks*, and *composes*; while other invaders of the press, how voluminous, and learned soever, (with due respect be it spoken) only *read*, and *write*.

This is the difference between those two luminaries in literature, the well-accomplished scholar, and the divinely-inspired enthusiast; the *first* is, as the bright morning star; the *second*, as the rising sun. The writer who neglects those two rules above will never stand alone; he makes one of a group, and thinks in wretched unanimity with the throng: Incumbered with the notions of others, and impoverished by their abundance, he conceives not the least embryo of new thought; opens not the least vista thro' the gloom of ordinary writers, into the bright walks of rare imagination, and singular design; while the true genius is crossing all publick roads into fresh untrodden ground; he, up to the knees in antiquity, is treading the sacred footsteps of great examples,

with the blind veneration of a bigot saluting the papal toe; comfortably hoping full absolution for the sins of his own understanding, from the powerful charm of touching his idol's infallibility.

Such meanness of mind, such prostration of our own powers, proceeds from too great admiration of others. Admiration has, generally, a degree of two very bad ingredients in it; of ignorance, and of fear; and does mischief in Composition, and in life. Proud as the world is, there is more superiority in it *given*, than *assumed*: And its grandees of all kinds owe more of their elevation to the littleness of others minds, than to the greatness of their own. Were not prostrate spirits their voluntary pedestals, the  
figure

figure they make among mankind would not stand so high. *Imitators* and *Translators* are somewhat of the pedestal-kind, and sometimes rather raise their *Original's* reputation, by showing him to be by them inimitable, than their own. *Homer* has been translated into most languages; *Ælian* tells us, that the *Indians*, (hopeful tutors!) have taught him to speak their tongue. What expect we from them? Not *Homer's Achilles*, but something, which, like *Patroclus*, assumes his name, and, at its peril, appears in his stead; nor expect we *Homer's Ulysses*, gloriously bursting out of his cloud into royal grandeur, but an *Ulysses* under disguise, and a beggar to the last. Such is that inimitable father of poetry, and oracle of all the wise, whom *Lycurgus* transcribed; and for an annual

nual public recital of whose works *Selen* enacted a law; that it is much to be feared, that his so numerous translations are but as the publish'd testimonials of so many nations, and ages, that this author so divine is untranslated still.

But here,

*Cynthia aurem*

*Vellit,*—

VIRG.

and demands justice for his favourite, and ours. Great things he has done; but he might have done greater. What a fall is it from *Homer's* numbers, free as air, lofty and harmonious as the spheres, into childish shackles, and tinkling sounds! But, in his fall, he is still great—

*Nen*



Nor appears  
 Less than archangel ruin'd, and the  
 excess  
 Of glory obscur'd.— MILT.

Had *Milton* never wrote, *Pope* had been less to blame: But when in *Milton's* genius, *Homer*, as it were, personally rose to forbid *Britons* doing him that ignoble wrong; it is less pardonable, by that effeminate decoration, to put *Achilles* in petticoats a second time: How much nobler had it been, if his numbers had rolled on in full flow, through the various modulations of *masculine* melody, into those grandeurs of solemn sound, which are indispensably demanded by the native dignity of heroick song? How much nobler, if he had resisted the temptation of that *Gothic* dæmon, which modern  
 poesy

poesy tasting, became mortal? O how unlike the deathless, divine harmony of three great names (how justly join'd!), of *Milton, Greece,* and *Rome*? His verse, but for this little speck of mortality, in its extreme parts, as his hero had in his heel; like him, had been invulnerable, and immortal. But, unfortunately, *that* was undipt in *Helicon*; as *this*, in *Styx*. Harmony as well as eloquence is essential to poesy; and a murder of his musick is putting half *Homer* to death. *Blank* is a term of diminution; what we mean by blank verse, is, verse unfallen, uncurst; verse reclaim'd, reinthron'd in the true *language of the gods*; who never thunder'd, nor suffer'd their *Homer* to thunder, in rhyme; and therefore, I beg you, my Friend, to crown it with  
some

some nobler term; nor let the greatness of the thing lie under the defamation of such a name.

But supposing *Pope's Iliad* to have been perfect in its kind; yet it is a *Translation* still; which differs as much from an *Original*, as the moon from the sun.

—*Phæben alieno jusserat igne  
Impleri, solemque suo.*      CLAUD.

But as nothing is more easy than to write originally wrong; Originals are not here recommended, but under the strong guard of my first rule—*Know thyself.* *Lucian*, who was an Original, neglected not this rule, if we may judge by his reply to one who took some freedom with him. He was, at first, an apprentice to a statuary; and when he was reflected

reflected on as such, by being called *Prometheus*, he replied, " I am indeed the inventor of new work,  
 " the model of which I owe to none;  
 " and, if I do not execute it well, I  
 " deserve to be torn by twelve vulturs,  
 " instead of one."

If so, O *Gulliver* ! dost thou not shudder at thy brother *Lucian's* vulturs hovering o'er thee? Shudder on ! they cannot shock thee more; than decency has been shock'd by thee. How have thy *Houyhnhnms* thrown thy judgment from its seat, and laid thy imagination in the mire? In what ordure hast thou dipt thy pencil? What a monster hast thou made of the

—*Human face divine?* MILT.

This writer has so satirised human nature,

nature, as to give a demonstration in himself, that it deserves to be satirized. But, say his wholesale admirers, Few could *so* have written; true, and Fewer *would*. If it required great abilities to commit the fault, greater still would have saved him from it. But whence arise such warm advocates for such a performance? From hence, *viz.* before a character is established, merit makes fame; afterwards fame makes merit. *Swift* is not commended for this piece, but this piece for *Swift*. He has given us some beauties which deserve all our praise; and our comfort is, that his faults will not become common; for none can be guilty of them, but who have wit as well as reputation to spare. His wit had been less wild, if his temper had not jostled his judgment. If his favourite *Houyhbnuss* could write,

write, and *Swift* had been one of them, every horse with him would have been an ass, and he would have written a panegyrick on mankind, saddling with much reproach the present heroes of his pen: On the contrary, being born amongst men, and, of consequence, piqued by many, and peevish at more, he has blasphemed a nature little lower than that of angels, and assumed by far higher than they: But surely the contempt of the world is not a greater virtue, than the contempt of mankind is a vice. Therefore I wonder that, though forborn by others, the laughter-loving *Swift* was not reproved by the venerable Dean, who could sometimes be very grave.

For I remember, as I and others were taking with him an evening's walk,

walk, about a mile out of *Dublin*, he stopt short; we passed on; but perceiving that he did not follow us, I went back; and found him fixed as a statue, and earnestly gazing upward at a noble elm, which in its uppermost branches was much withered, and decayed. Pointing at it, he said, "I shall be like that tree, I shall die at top." As in this he seemed to prophesy like the Sybils; if, like one of them, he had burnt part of his works, especially *this* blasted branch of a noble genius, like her too, he might have risen in his demand for the rest.

Would not his friend *Pope* have succeeded better in an *original* attempt? Talents untried are talents unknown. All that I know, is, that, contrary to these sentiments,

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he was not only an avowed professor of imitation, but a zealous recommender of it also. Nor could he recommend any thing better, except emulation, to those who write. One of these all writers must call to their aid ; but aids they are of unequal repute. Imitation is inferiority confessed ; emulation is superiority contested, or denied ; imitation is servile, emulation generous ; that fetters, this fires ; that may give a name ; this, a name immortal : This made *Athens* to succeeding ages the rule of taste, and the standard of perfection. Her men of genius struck fire against each other ; and kindled, by conflict, into glories, which no time shall extinguish. We thank *Eschylus* for *Sophocles* ; and *Parrhasius* for *Zeuxis* ; emulation, for both. That bids us fly the  
gene-



general fault of *imitators*; bids us not be struck with the loud report of former fame, as with a knell, which damps the spirits; but, as with a trumpet, which inspires ardour to rival the renown'd. Emulation exhorts us, instead of learning our discipline for ever, like raw troops, under antient leaders in composition; to put those laurel'd veterans in some hazard of losing their superior posts in glory.

Such is emulation's high-spirited advice, such her immortalizing call. *Pope* would not hear, pre-engaged with imitation, which blessed him with all her charms. He chose rather, with his namesake of *Greece*, to triumph in the old world, than to look out for a new. His taste partook the error of his religion; it

denied not worship to saints and angels; that is, to writers, who, canonized for ages, have received their apotheosis from established and universal fame. True poesy, like true religion, abhors idolatry; and though it honours the memory of the exemplary, and takes them willingly (yet cautiously) as guides in the way to glory; real, though unexampled, excellence is its only aim; nor looks it for any inspiration less than divine.

Though *Pope's* noble muse may boast her illustrious descent from *Homer, Virgil, Horace*, yet is an *Original* author more nobly born. As *Tacitus* says of *Curtius Rufus*, an *Original* author is born of himself, is his own progenitor, and will probably propagate a numerous offspring

spring of imitators, to eternize his glory ; while mule-like imitators die without issue. Therefore, though we stand much obliged for his giving us an *Homer*, yet had he doubled our obligation, by giving us—a *Pope*. Had he a strong imagination, and the true sublime ? That granted, we might have had two *Homers* instead of one, if longer had been his life ; for I heard the dying swan talk over an epic plan a few weeks before his decease.

*Bacon*, under the shadow of whose great name I would shelter my present attempt in favour of *Originals*, says, “ Men seek not to know their  
 “ own stock, and abilities ; but fancy  
 “ their possessions to be greater, and  
 “ their abilities less, than they really  
 “ are.” Which is, in effect, saying,

“ That we ought to exert more than  
 “ we do ; and that, on exertion,  
 “ our probability of success is greater  
 “ than we conceive.”

Nor have I *Bacon's* opinion only, but his assistance too, on my side. His mighty mind travelled round the intellectual world ; and, with a more than eagle's eye, saw, and has pointed out, blank spaces, or dark spots in it, on which the human mind never shone : Some of these have been enlightened since ; some are benighted still.

Moreover, so boundless are the bold excursions of the human mind, that in the vast void beyond real existence, it can call forth shadowy beings, and unknown worlds, as numerous, as bright, and, perhaps,

as lasting, as the stars; such quite-original beauties we may call paradisaical,

*Natos sine semine flores.* OVID.

When such an ample area for renowned adventure in *original* attempts lies before us, shall we be as mere leaden pipes, conveying to the present age small streams of excellence from its grand reservoir in antiquity; and those too, perhaps, mudded in the pass? *Originals* shine, like comets; have no peer in their path; are rival'd by none, and the gaze of all: All other compositions (if they shine at all) shine in clusters; like the stars in the galaxy; where, like bad neighbours, all suffer from all; each particular being diminished, and almost lost in the throng.

If thoughts of this nature pre-  
F 4                    vailed;

vailed ; if antients and moderns were no longer considered as masters and pupils, but as hard-matched rivals for renown ; then moderns, by the longevity of their labours, might, one day, become antients themselves : And old time, that best weigher of merits, to keep his balance even, might have the golden weight of an *Augustan* age in both his scales ; Or rather our scale might descend ; and that of antiquity (as a modern match for it strongly speaks) might *kick the beam*,

And why not ? For, consider, *since* an impartial Providence scatters talents indifferently, as thro' all orders of persons, so thro' all periods of time ; *since*, a marvellous light, unenjoy'd of old, is pour'd on us by revelation, with larger prospects extending

extending our understanding, with brighter objects enriching our imagination, with an inestimable prize setting our passions on fire, thus strengthening every power that enables composition to shine; *since*, there has been no fall in man on this side *Adam*, who left no works, and the works of all other antients are our auxiliars against themselves, as being perpetual spurs to our ambition, and shining lamps in our path to fame; *since*, this world is a school, as well for intellectual, as moral, advance; and the longer human nature is at school, the better scholar it should be; *since*, as the moral world expects its glorious millennium, the world intellectual may hope, by the rules of analogy, for some superior degrees of excellence to crown her later scenes; nor may it

it only hope, but must enjoy them too; for *Tully*, *Quintilian*, and all true critics allow, that virtue assists genius, and that the writer will be more able, when better is the man — All these particulars, I say, considered, why should it seem altogether impossible, that heaven's latest editions of the human mind may be the most correct, and fair; that the day may come, when the moderns may proudly look back on the comparative darkness of former ages, on the children of antiquity; reputing *Homer* and *Demosthenes*, as the dawn of divine genius; and *Athens* as the cradle of infant fame; what a glorious revolution would this make in the rolls of renown?

What a rant, say you, is here?  
—I partly grant it: Yet, consider,  
my



my friend! knowlege phyſical, mathematical, moral, and divine, increaſes; all arts and ſciences are making conſiderable advance; with them, all the accommodations, ornaments, delights, and glories of human life; and theſe are new food to the genius of a polite writer; theſe are as the root, and compoſition, as the flower; and as the root ſpreads, and thrives, ſhall the flower fail? As well may a flower flouriſh, when the root is dead. It is prudence to read, genius to reſiſh, glory to ſurpaſs, antient authors; and wiſdom to try our ſtrength, in an attempt in which it would be no great diſhonour to fail.

Why condemn'd *Maro* his admirable epic to the flames? Was it not becauſe his diſcerning eye ſaw  
ſome

some length of perfection beyond it? And what he saw, may not others reach? And who bid fairer than our countrymen for that glory? Something new may be expected from *Britons* particularly; who seem not to be more fever'd from the rest of mankind by the surrounding sea, than by the current in their veins; and of whom little more appears to be required, in order to give us *Originals*, than a consistency of character, and making their compositions of a piece with their lives. May our genius shine; and proclaim us in that nobler view!

— *minimâ contentos nocte Britannos.* VIRG.  
 And so it does; for in polite composition, in natural, and mathematical, knowlege, we have great *Originals* already: *Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Shakespear, Milton,* have showed  
 us,

us, that all the winds cannot blow the *British* flag farther, than an original spirit can convey the *British* fame; their names go round the world; and what foreign genius strikes not as they pass? Why should not their posterity embark in the same bold bottom of new enterprise, and hope the same success? Hope it they may; or you must assert, either that those *Originals*, which we already enjoy, were written by angels, or deny that we are men. As *Simonides* said to *Pausanias*, reason should say to the writer, “Remember thou art a man.” And for man not to grasp at all which is laudable within his reach, is a dishonour to human nature, and a disobedience to the divine; for as heaven does nothing in vain, its gift of talents implies an injunction of their use.

A friend of mine has obeyed that injunction ; he has relied on himself, and with a genius, as well *moral*, as *original* (to speak in bold terms), has cast out evil spirits ; has made a convert to virtue of a species of composition, once most its foe. As the first christian emperors expell'd dæmons, and dedicated their temples to the living God.

But you, I know, are sparing in your praise of this author ; therefore I will speak of one, which is sure of your applause. *Shakespeare* mingled no water with his wine, lower'd his genius by no vapid imitation. *Shakespeare* gave us a *Shakespeare*, nor could the first in antient fame have given us more. *Shakespeare* is not their son, but brother ; their equal ; and that, in spite of all his faults.

Think

Think you this too bold? Consider, in those antients what is it the world admires? Not the fewness of their faults, but the number and brightness of their beauties; and if *Shakespeare* is their equal (as he doubtless is) in that, which in them is admired, then is *Shakespeare* as great as they; and not impotence, but some other cause, must be charged with his defects. When we are setting these great men in competition, what but the comparative size of their genius is the subject of our inquiry? And a giant loses nothing of his size, tho' he should chance to trip in his race. But it is a compliment to those heroes of antiquity to suppose *Shakespeare* their equal only in dramatic powers; therefore, though his faults had been greater, the scale would still turn in his favour.

your. There is at least as much genius on the *British* as on the *Grecian* stage, tho' the former is not swept so clean; so clean from violations not only of the *dramatic*, but *moral* rule; for an honest heathen, on reading some of our celebrated scenes, might be seriously concerned to see, that our obligations to the religion of nature were cancel'd by Christianity.

*Johnson*, in the serious drama, is as much an imitator, as *Shakespeare* is an original. He was very learned, as *Sampson* was very strong, to his own hurt: Blind to the nature of tragedy, he pulled down all antiquity on his head, and buried himself under it; we see nothing of *Johnson*, nor indeed, of his admired (but also murdered) antients; for

what done in the historian is a cloud on the poet; and *Cataline* might have been a good play, if *Swiss* had never writ.

Who knows whether *Shakespeare* might not have thought less; if he had read more? Who knows if he might not have laboured under the load of *Jobson's* learning, as *Emeladus* under *Aetna*? His mighty genius, indeed; through the most mountainous oppression would have breathed out some of his inextinguishable fire; yet, possibly, he might not have risen up into that giant, that much more than common man, at which we now gaze with amazement, and delight. Perhaps he was as learned as his dramatic province required; for whatever other learning he wanted, he was master of two books, un-

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known

known to many of the profoundly read, though books, which the last conflagration alone can destroy; the book of nature, and that of man. These he had by heart, and has transcribed many admirable pages of them, into his immortal works. These are the fountain-head, whence the *Castilian* streams of original composition flow; and these are often mudded by other waters, tho' waters in their distinct chanel, most wholesome and pure: As two chymical liquors, separately clear as crystal, grow foul by mixture, and offend the sight. So that he had not only as much learning as his dramatic province required, but, perhaps, as it could safely bear. If *Milton* had spared some of his learning, his muse would have gained more glory, than he would have lost, by it.

*Dryden*



*Dryden*, destitute of *Shakespeare's* genius, had almost as much learning as *Johnson*, and, for the buskin, quite as little taste. He was a stranger to the pathos, and, by numbers, expression, sentiment, and every other dramatic cheat, strove to make amends for it; as if a saint could make amends for the want of conscience; a soldier, for the want of valour; or a vestal, of modesty. The noble nature of tragedy disclaims an equivalent; like virtue, it demands the heart; and *Dryden* had none to give. Let epic poets *think*, the tragedian's point is rather to *feel*; such distant things are a tragedian and a poet, that the latter indulged, destroys the former. Look on *Barnwell*, and *Essex*, and see how as to these distant characters *Dryden* excells, and is excelled. But the

strongest demonstration of his no-taste for the buskin, are his tragedies fringed with rhyme; which, in epic poetry, is a fore disease, in the tragic, absolute death. To *Dryden's* enormity, *Pope's* was a light offence. As lacemen are foes to mourning, these two authors, rich in rhyme, were no great friends to those solemn ornaments, which the noble nature of their works required.

Must rhyme then, say you, be banished? I wish the nature of our language could bear its intire expulsion; but our lesser poetry stands in need of a toleration for it; it raises that, but sinks the great; as spangles adorn children, but expose men. Prince *Henry* bespangled all over in his oylet-hole suit, with glittering pins; and an *Achilles*, or an *Al-*  
*manzor,*

*manzor*, in his *Gothic* array; are very much on a level, as to the majesty of the poet, and the prince. *Dryden* had a great, but a general capacity; and as for a general genius, there is no such thing in nature: A genius implies the rays of the mind concenter'd, and determined to some particular point; when they are scatter'd widely, they act feebly, and strike not with sufficient force, to fire, or dissolve, the heart. As what comes from the writer's heart, reaches ours; so what comes from his head, sets our brains at work, and our hearts at ease. It makes a circle of thoughtful critics, not of distressed patients; and a passive audience, is what tragedy requires. Applause is not to be given, but extorted; and the silent lapse of a single tear, does the writer more honour, than the rattling

thunder of a thousand hands. Applauding hands, and dry eyes (which during *Dryden's* theatrical reign often met) are a satire on the writer's talent, and the spectator's taste. When by such judges the laurel is blindly given, and by such a poet proudly received, they resemble an intoxicated hoste, and his tasteless guests, over some sparkling adulteration, commending their Champaign.

But *Dryden* has his glory, tho' not on the stage: What an inimitable *original* is his ode? A small one, indeed, but of the first lustre, and without a flaw; and, amid the brightest boasts of antiquity, it may find a foil.

Among the brightest of the moderns, Mr. *Addison* must take his  
 3 place,

place. Who does not approach his character with great respect? They who refuse to close with the public in his praise, refuse at their peril. But, if men will be fond of their own opinions, some hazard must be run. He had, what *Dryden* and *Johnson* wanted, a warm, and feeling heart; but, being of a grave and bashful nature, thro' a philosophic reserve, and a sort of moral prudery, he conceal'd it, where he should have let loose all his fire, and have show'd the most tender sensibilities of heart. At his celebrated *Cato*, few tears are shed, but *Cato's* own; which, indeed, are truly great, but unassuming, except to the noble few, who love their country better than themselves. The bulk of mankind want virtue enough to be touched by them. His strength

of genius has reared up one glorious image, more lofty, and truly golden, than that in the plains of *Dura*, for cool admiration to gaze at, and warm patriotism (how rare!) to worship; while those two throbbing pulses of the drama, by which alone it is shown to live, *terror* and *pity*, neglected thro' the whole; leave our unmolested hearts at perfect peace. Thus the poet, like his hero, thro' mistaken excellence, and virtue overstrain'd, becomes a sort of suicide; and that which is most dramatic in the drama, dies. All his charms of poetry are but as funeral flowers, which adorn; all his noble sentiments but as rich spices, which embalm, the tragedy deceased.

Of tragedy, pathos is not only the life and soul, but the soul  
inex-

inextinguishable; it charms us thro' a thousand faults. Decorations, which in this author abound, tho' they might immortalize other poesy, are the *splendida peccata* which damn the drama; while, on the contrary, the murder of all other beauties is a venial sin, nor plucks the laurel from the tragedian's brow. Was it otherwise, *Shakespeare* himself would run some hazard of losing his crown.

*Socrates* frequented the plays of *Euripides*; and, what living *Socrates* would decline the theatre, at the representation of *Cato*? *Tully's* assassins found him in his litter, reading the *Medea* of the *Grecian* poet, to prepare himself for death. Part of *Cato* might be read to the same end. In the weight and dignity of  
of

of moral reflection, *Addison* resembles that poet, who was called the dramatic philosopher; and is himself, as he says of *Cato*, *ambitiously sententious*. But as to the singular talent so remarkable in *Euripides*, at melting down hearts into the tender streams of grief and pity, there the resemblance fails. His beauties sparkle, but do not warm; they sparkle as stars in a frosty night. There is, indeed, a constellation in his play; there is the philosopher, patriot, orator, and poet; but where is the tragedian? And, if that is wanting,

*Cur in theatrum Cato severe venisti?*

MART.

And, when I recollect what passed between him and *Dryden*, in relation to this drama, I must add the next line,

*An*



*An ideo tantum veneras, ut exires ?*

For, when *Addison* was a student at *Oxford*, he sent up this play to his friend *Dryden*, as a proper person to recommend it to the theatre, if it deserved it; who returned it, with very great commendation; but with his opinion, that, on the stage, it could not meet with its deserved success. But tho' the performance was denied the theatre, it brought its author on the public stage of life. For persons in power inquiring soon after of the head of his college for a youth of parts, *Addison* was recommended, and readily received, by means of the great reputation which *Dryden* had just then spread of him above.

There

There is this similitude between the poet and the play; as this is more fit for the closet than the stage; so, that shone brighter in private conversation than on the public scene. They both had a sort of *local* excellency, as the heathen gods a local divinity; beyond such a bound *they*, unadmired; and *these*, unadored. This puts me in mind of *Plato*, who denied *Homer* to the public; that *Homer*, which, when in his closet, was rarely out of his hand. Thus, tho' *Cato* is not calculated to signalize himself in the warm emotions of the theatre, yet we find him a most amiable companion, in our calmer delights of recess.

Notwithstanding what has been offered, this, in many views, is an  
 exquisite

exquisite piece. But there is so much more of art, than nature in it, that I can scarce forbear calling it, an exquisite piece of statuary,

*Where the smooth chisel all its skill has shown,  
To soften into flesh the rugged stone.*

ADDISON.

That is, where art has taken great pains to labour undramatic matter into dramatic life ; which is impossible. However, as it is, like *Pygmalion*, we cannot but fall in love with it, and wish it was alive. How would a *Shakespeare*, or an *Otway*, have answered our wishes ? They would have outdone *Prometheus*, and, with their heavenly fire, have given him not only life, but immortality. At their dramas (such is the force of nature) the poet is out of sight, quite hid behind his *Venus*, never thought of, till the curtain

curtain falls. Art brings our author forward, he stands before his piece ; splendidly indeed, but unfortunately ; for the writer must be forgotten by his audience, during the representation, if for ages he would be remembered by posterity. In the theatre, as in life, delusion is the charm ; and we are undelighted, the first moment we are undeceived. Such demonstration have we, that the theatre is not yet opened, in which solid happiness can be found by man ; because none are more than comparatively good ; and folly has a corner in the heart of the wife.

A genius fond of *ornament*  
 should not be wedded to the tra-  
 gic muse, which is in *mourning* ;  
 We

We want not to be diverted at an entertainment, where our greatest pleasure arises from the depth of our concern. But whence (by the way) this odd generation of pleasure from pain? The movement of our melancholy passions is pleasant, when we ourselves are safe: We love to be at once, miserable, and unhurt: So are we made; and so made, perhaps, to show us the divine goodness; to show that none of our passions were designed to give us pain, except when being pain'd is for our advantage on the whole; which is evident from this instance, in which we see, that passions the most painful administer greatly, sometimes, to our delight. Since great names have accounted otherwise for this particular, I wish  
this

this solution, though to me probable, may not prove a mistake.

To close our thoughts on *Cato* : He who sees not much beauty in it, has no taste for poetry; he who sees nothing else, has no taste for the stage. Whilst it justifies censure, it extorts applause. It is much to be admired, but little to be felt. Had it not been a tragedy, it had been immortal; as it is a tragedy, its uncommon fate somewhat resembles his, who, for conquering gloriously, was condemn'd to die. Both shone, but shone fatally; because in breach of their respective laws, the laws of the drama, and the laws of arms. But how rich in reputation must that author be, who can spare a *Cato*, without feeling the loss?

That

That loss by our author would scarce be felt; it would be but dropping a single feather from a wing, that mounts him above his contemporaries. He has a more refined, decent, judicious, and extensive genius, than *Pope*, or *Swift*. To distinguish this triumvirate from each other, and, like *Newton*, to discover the different colours in these genuine and meridian rays of literary light, *Swift* is a singular wit, *Pope* a correct poet, *Addison* a great author. *Swift* looked on wit as the *jus divinum* to dominion and sway in the world; and considered as usurpation, all power that was lodged in persons of less sparkling understandings. This inclined him to tyranny in wit; *Pope* was somewhat of his opinion, but was for softening tyranny into lawful monarchy; yet were there

some acts of severity in his reign. *Addison's* crown was elective, he reigned by the public voice :

——— *Volentes*

*Per populos dat jura, viamque affectat Olympo.*  
VIRG.

But as good books are the medicine of the mind, if we should dethrone these authors, and consider them, not in their royal, but their medicinal capacity, might it not then be said, that *Addison* prescribed a wholesome and pleasant regimen, which was universally relished, and did much good ; that *Pope* preferred a purgative of satire, which, tho' wholesome, was too painful in its operation ; and that *Swift* insisted on a large dose of ipecacuanha, which, tho' readily swallowed from the fame of the physician, yet, if the patient had any



any delicacy of taste, he threw up the remedy, instead of the disease?

*Addison* wrote little in verse, much in sweet, elegant, *Virgilian*, prose; so let me call it, since *Longinus* calls *Herodotus* most *Homeric*, and *Thucydides* is said to have formed his style on *Pindar*. *Addison's* compositions are built with the finest materials, in the taste of the ancients, and (to speak his own language) on truly *Classic ground*: And tho' they are the delight of the present age, yet am I persuaded that they will receive more justice from posterity. I never read him, but I am struck with such a disheartening idea of perfection, that I drop my pen. And, indeed, far superior writers should forget his com-

H 2      positions,

positions, if they would be greatly pleased with their own.

And yet (perhaps you have not observed it) what is the common language of the world, and even of his admirers, concerning him? They call him an *elegant* writer: That elegance which shines on the surface of his compositions, seems to dazzle their understanding, and render it a little blind to the depth of sentiment, which lies beneath: Thus (hard fate!) he loses reputation with them, by doubling his title to it. On subjects the most interesting, and important, no author of his age has written with greater, I had almost said, with equal weight: And they who commend him for his elegance, pay him such a sort of compliment, by their abstemious praise,

as

as they would pay to *Lucretia*, if they should commend her only for her beauty.

But you say, that you know his value already—You know, indeed, the value of his writings, and close with the world in thinking them immortal; but, I believe, you know not, that his name would have deserved immortality, tho' he had never written; and that, by a better title than the pen can give: You know too, that his life was amiable; but, perhaps, you are still to learn, that his death was triumphant: That is a glory granted to very few: And the paternal hand of Providence, which, sometimes, snatches home its beloved children in a moment, must convince us, that it is a glory of no great consequence to the dy-

ing individual; that, when it is granted, it is granted chiefly for the sake of the surviving world, which may profit by his pious example, to whom is indulged the strength, and opportunity to make his virtue shine out brightest at the point of death: And, here, permit me to take notice, that the world will, probably, profit more by a pious example of lay-extraction, than by one born of the church; the latter being, usually, taxed with an abatement of influence by the bulk of mankind: Therefore, to smother a bright example of this superior good influence, may be reputed a sort of murder injurious to the living, and unjust to the dead.

Such an example have we in *Addison*; which, tho' hitherto suppressed, yet, when once known, is in-  
sup-

fuppreffible, of a nature too rare, too  
 ftriking to be forgotten. For, after  
 a long, and manly, but vain ftruggle  
 with his diftemper, he difmiffed his  
 phyficians, and with them all hopes  
 of life: But with his hopes of life  
 he difmiffed not his concern for the  
 living, but fent for a youth nearly  
 related, and finely accomplifhed, yet  
 not above being the better for good  
 impreffions from a dying friend: He  
 came; but life now glimmering in  
 the focket, the dying friend was  
 filent: After a decent, and proper  
 pause, the youth faid, “ Dear Sir!  
 “ you fent for me: I believe, and  
 “ I hope, that you have fome com-  
 “ mands; I fhall hold them moft  
 “ facred:” May diftant ages not  
 only hear, but feel, the reply! Forci-  
 bly grafping the youth’s hand, he  
 foftly faid, “ See in what peace a  
 H 4 “ Christian

“ Christian can die.” He spoke with difficulty, and soon expired. Thro’ grace divine, how great is man! Thro’ divine mercy, how stingsless death! Who would not thus expire?

What an inestimable legacy were those *few dying words* to the youth beloved? What a glorious supplement to his own valuable fragment on the truth of Christianity? What a full demonstration, that his fancy could not feign beyond what his virtue could reach? For when he would strike us most strongly with the grandeur of *Roman* magnanimity, his dying hero is ennobled with this sublime sentiment,

*While yet I live, let me not live in vain.*

CATO.

But how much more sublime is  
that

that sentiment when realized in life ; when dispelling the languors, and appeasing the pains of a last hour ; and brightening with illustrious action the dark avenue, and all-awful confines of an eternity ? When his soul scarce animated his body, strong faith, and ardent charity, animated his soul into divine ambition of saving more than his own. It is for our honour, and our advantage, to hold him high in our esteem : For the better men are, the more they will admire him ; and the more they admire him, the better will they be.

By undrawing the long-closed curtain of his death-bed, have I not showed you a stranger in him whom you knew so well ? Is not this of your favourite author,

—*Nota*

—*Notá major imago?* VIRG.

His compositions are but a noble preface; the grand work is his death: That is a work which is read in heaven: How has it join'd the final approbation of angels to the previous applause of men? How gloriously has he opened a splendid path, thro' fame immortal, into eternal peace? How has he given religion to triumph amidst the ruins of his nature? And, stronger than death, risen higher in virtue when breathing his last?

If all our men of genius had *so* breathed their last; if all our men of genius, like him, had been men of genius for *eternals*; *then*, had we never been pained by the report of a latter end—oh! how unlike to this? But a little to balance our  
pain,



pain, let us consider, that such reports as make us, at once, adore, and tremble, are of use, when too many there are, who must tremble before they will adore; and who convince us, to our shame, that the surest refuge of our endanger'd virtue is in the fears and terrors of the disingenuous human heart,

“ But reports, you say, may be  
 “ false; and you farther ask me,  
 “ If all reports were true, how came  
 “ an anecdote of so much honour  
 “ to human nature, as mine, to lie  
 “ so long unknown? What inauspi-  
 “ cious planet interposed to lay its  
 “ lustre under so lasting and so  
 “ surprising an eclipse?”

The fact is indisputably true; nor  
 are you to rely on me for the truth  
 of

of it: My report is but a second edition: It was published before, tho' obscurely, and with a cloud before it. As clouds before the sun are often beautiful; so, this of which I speak. How finely pathetic are those two lines, which this so solemn and affecting scene inspired?

*He taught us how to live; and, oh! too high  
A price for knowlege, taught us how to die.*

TICKELL.

With truth wrapped in darkness, so sung our oracle to the public, but explained himself to me: He was present at his patron's death, and that account of it here given, he gave to me before his eyes were dry: By what means *Addison taught us how to die*, the poet left to be made known by a late, and less able hand; but one more zealous for his patron's glory:

glory : Zealous, and impotent, as the poor *Ægyptian*, who gather'd a few splinters of a broken boat, as a funeral pile for the great *Pompey*, studious of doing honour to so renown'd a name : Yet had not this poor plank (permit me, here, so to call this imperfect page) been thrown out, the chief article of his patron's glory would probably have been sunk for ever, and late ages have received but a fragment of his fame : A fragment glorious indeed, for his genius how bright ! But to commend him for composition, tho' immortal, is detraction *now* ; if there our encomium ends : Let us look farther to that concluding scene, which spoke human nature not unrelated to the divine. To that let us pay the long, and large arrear of our greatly posthumous applause.

This

This you will think a long digression; and justly; if that may be called a digression, which was my chief inducement for writing at all: I had long wished to deliver up to the public this sacred deposit, which by Providence was lodged in my hands; and I entered on the present undertaking partly as an introduction to that, which is more worthy to see the light; of which I gave an intimation in the beginning of my letter: For this is the *monumental marble* there mentioned, to which I promised to conduct you; this is the *sepulchral lamp*, the long-hidden lustre of our accomplished countryman, who now rises, as from his tomb, to receive the regard so greatly due to the dignity of his death; a death to be distinguished by tears of joy; a death which angels beheld with delight.

And

And shall that, which would have shone conspicuous amid the resplendent lights of Christianity's glorious morn, by these dark days be dropped into oblivion? Dropped it is; and dropped by our sacred, august, and ample register of renown, which has entered in its marble-memoirs the dim splendor of far inferior worth: Tho' so lavish of praise, and so talkative of the dead, yet is it silent on a subject, which (if any) might have taught its unletter'd stones to speak: If powers were not wanting, a monument more durable than those of marble, should proudly rise in this ambitious page, to the new, and far nobler *Addison*, than that which you, and the public, have so long, and so much admired: Nor this nation only; for it is *Europe's Addison*, as well as ours; tho' *Europe* knows  
not

not half his title to her esteem ; being as yet unconscious that the *dying Addison* far outshines her *Addison immortal* : Would we resemble him ? Let us not limit our ambition to the least illustrious part of his character ; heads, indeed, are crowned on earth ; but hearts only are crowned in heaven : A truth, which, in such an *age of authors*, should not be forgotten.

It is piously to be hoped, that this narrative may have some effect, since all listen, when a death-bed speaks ; and regard the person departing as an actor of a part, which the great master of the drama has appointed us to perform to-morrow : This was a *Roscius* on the stage of life ; his exit how great ? Ye lovers of virtue ! *plaudite* : And let us, my friend !

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friend! ever “ remember his end,  
“ as well as our own, that we may  
“ never do amiss.” I am,

*Dear SIR,*

*Your most obliged,*

*humble Servant.*

*P. S.* How far *Addison* is an  
*Original*, you will see in my next ;  
where I descend from this consecrated  
ground into his sublunary praise :  
And great is the descent, tho' into  
noble heights of *intellectual* power.

